

Taiwan Assures U.S. on Kennedy Book

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 23 — The United States has discussed with the Chinese Nationalist Government the possibility of preventing publication in Taiwan of an unauthorized version of William Manchester's controversial book on President Kennedy's assassination.

As a result of these recent diplomatic discussions, the Government in Taipei apparently has given assurances that it will attempt to prevent publication of a pirated edition of the original version of the book, "The Death of a President."

A State Department spokesman said tonight that "the Chinese Government is as interested as the United States Government to see that no actions are taken by Chinese publishers that would be offensive to interested parties here in the United States."

Robert J. McCloskey, State Department spokesman, confirmed that "discussions" about the manuscript had been held in recent days between members of the United States Embassy in Taipei and officials of the Chinese Nationalist Government.

Mr. McCloskey was vague about the nature of the discussions, saying only that they dealt with "the manuscript." From a later statement issued by the State Department, however, it was apparent that the discussions dealt with the possibility that unauthorized portions of the manuscript might be published in Taiwan.

The discussions were initiated, according to the State Department, by the Taiwan Embassy here, which voiced its concern over newspaper reports that the manuscript might have found its way into the hands of publishing houses in Taiwan. The embassy informed the department that it had recommended to its Government that Taiwan publishers be discouraged from using any such manuscript. Discussions were then held in Taipei between the two Governments.

Mr. McCloskey seemed to rule out the possibility that the State Department's unusual step of discussing a book manuscript with a foreign government was prompted by any of the participants in the controversy.

"So far as I am aware," he said, no request for State Department intervention in Taipei had been received from Mrs. John F. Kennedy, the publishers of the book, Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., or from any member of Congress.

No Katzenbach Message

An aide to Under Secretary of State Nicholas deB. Katzenbach said that no message requesting the United States embassy in Taipei to raise the issue with the Nationalist Government had been sent from Mr. Katzenbach's office. Mr. Katzenbach is a former subordinate of Senator Robert F. Kennedy when the latter was Attorney General and a close friend of the Kennedy family.

Senator Kennedy has been active in the legal efforts by Mrs. Kennedy to prevent publication of the book as originally written by Mr. Manchester.

One phase of the legal dispute was settled out of court this week when Look magazine, which will print a four-part serialization of an abridged version of the book next month, agreed to delete or revise some passages Mrs. Kennedy felt were an invasion of her privacy. A suit by Mrs. Kennedy is still pending against Harper & Row, which plans to publish the book next April.

It has been suggested that in the distribution of the original manuscript among potential publishers and purchasers of serial rights, some copies may have found their way into the hands of pirate book publishers in Taiwan.

A State Department spokesman said tonight, however, that "we have no evidence that the manuscript or any part of it is in Taiwan, nor does our present information give any indication that any Chinese publishing house is planning publication of the manuscript or part of it."

Since the Nationalist Government is not a signatory to the International Copyright Convention of 1955, a flourishing business has developed on Taiwan in publishing pirated low-cost editions of foreign books.

The Nationalist Government has passed a law against book piracy, but there have been no convictions under it.